

By George F. Will

## Reckless Concessions

*Excerpt*

### SLIPPERY DEFINITIONS

It seems inclined to accommodate the brazen Soviet claim that Backfires are not "heavy" bombers. Until recently U.S. intelligence sources agreed that Backfires, like the less competent Soviet Bisons (which count as "heavy" bombers), can strike the U.S. on unrefueled missions. Hence, Backfires, like U.S. B-52s, should count as "heavy" bombers under Vladivostok limits. But suddenly the CIA under George Bush (former GOP chairman) has produced a report, based on partial data, that says Backfires have only about half the range previously thought. This report is politically convenient if the Administration wants to rationalize a concession.

Another concession may concern cruise missiles — pilotless, subsonic, nonballistic winged aircraft. Using them, American bombers could stand off from Soviet targets and still hit them. (The ability of B-52s to penetrate Soviet air defenses is limited and will become more so, especially if we continue to sell the Soviets sophisticated computers.)

Ballistic, not cruise, missiles were discussed at Vladivostok. But U.S. cruise missiles are superior to Soviet models. So now the Soviets insist sea-launched cruise missiles must have only a 370-mile range. That means few Soviet targets would be in range of U.S. missiles while 125 million Americans would be in range of Soviet missiles.

Worse than that Soviet impertinence was the gratuitous Administration offer to count each bomber carrying cruise missiles against the limit of 1,320 MIRV missiles. This means that unless the U.S. dismantles some of the 1,286 MIRVed missiles deployed or planned, the U.S. can have only 34 bombers carrying cruise missiles. This probably would kill the cruise-missile program.

(Feeling a twinge of déjà vu? U.S. antiballistic missiles were much superior to Soviet ABM's in 1972 when Nixon agreed to a virtual ban on ABM's.)